

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE
DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARIAT

24 May 2016

Transmitted by email

The National Spiritual Assemblies of the Bahá'ís of
Australia, Austria, Brazil, Canada, France, Germany,
India, Ireland, Luxembourg, the Netherlands,
New Zealand, Norway, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland,
the United Kingdom, and the United States

Dear Bahá'í Friends,

In the last ten days there has been an unprecedented number of anti-Bahá'í statements across Iran, expressed within the official news media and in government-sponsored websites. Clerics, politicians, authorities within the Revolutionary Guard, high-ranking officers of the judiciary, the members of the Assembly of Experts, and parliamentarians have spoken with the voice of religious prejudice against the Bahá'ís, calling the individual members of the community “the enemy” and encouraging the population to disassociate themselves from the Bahá'ís and to have no contact with them. Fatwas written decades ago as well as those penned more recently that forbid Muslims from consorting with “infidel” Bahá'ís have been republished. The article posted on the Bahá'í World News Service on 19 May 2016 provides the background to a visit that prompted this vitriolic incitement to hatred.

In his sermon on Friday, 20 May, Áyatu'lláh Imámí Káshání (Ayatollah Imami Kashani)—Friday Prayer Leader of Tehran, an appointee of Ayatollah Khamenei and one of the most senior clerics in Iran—when addressing the faithful, referred to the Bahá'ís as a “polluted sect” and asked of his audience which country and which constitution allows “the enemy” to live within its borders. Scores of Friday prayer leaders, in twenty-five of the thirty-one provinces of Iran, also condemned the Bahá'í “sect” with similar words, claiming that Bahá'ism is not a Faith, a religion or an ideological belief, it is a fabricated political party. It should be noted that the Association of Friday Prayer Leaders, a nine-member council appointed by Ayatollah Khamenei, oversees the appointment and functioning of all the Friday prayer leaders in Iran and provides them with the themes for their weekly sermons. In another development, the editor of the *Kayhan* newspaper, considered in Iran as the mouthpiece of the Supreme Leader, referring to the Faith stated, “each and every member of this sect is considered a member of this Zionist party.” Hundreds of pieces inciting religious hatred against the Bahá'ís appeared after the sermons of the Friday prayer leaders were delivered. The volume of these is completely without precedent.

The plethora of negative articles has prompted a wide range of Iranian intellectuals outside Iran to emphasize the point that human rights need to be accorded to all those who live in Iran, whether they are members of religious minorities or hold different political views. Prominent figures have spoken out, clearly appealing to Iranians not to view the actions of the

authorities as being in any way acceptable. Within Iran also, a few notable individuals have, at considerable risk to themselves, publically shown both their rejection of the prejudiced and inflammatory actions of the authorities and their support for the rights of the Bahá'ís.

You are asked, through your Offices of External Affairs, to meet with your government contacts, appropriate non-governmental organizations, and individuals of influence and bring to their attention the recent action taken by the authorities in Iran against the largest non-Muslim religious minority in the country. They should become fully aware of the extent to which a widespread, coordinated, and systematic attack has been orchestrated by the Iranian authorities against a segment of its own citizens. They can be asked to consider whatever action they deem appropriate—from making a public statement to privately contacting the government of Iran, or any other action that they might consider would ameliorate the situation. While the media will not be the focus of your endeavours, those whose support you seek will naturally be free to make approaches as they wish. This campaign to incite religious hatred against the Bahá'ís has originated from the highest offices in that land. It is of added concern that the month of the Muslim fast will begin soon, a time in which religious fervour can be more easily aroused in Iran. Background materials that may be of use in its work will soon be supplied directly to your Office of External Affairs.

Alongside your own efforts, the Bahá'í International Community United Nations and Brussels Offices will be undertaking complementary initiatives at the international level. Kindly keep the Universal House of Justice and the Bahá'í International Community United Nations Offices apprised of the outcome of your efforts in this matter. The House of Justice will offer prayers in the Holy Shrines on your behalf for bountiful confirmations from Bahá'u'lláh on all your endeavours.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,

Department of the Secretariat

cc: International Teaching Centre
Bahá'í International Community,
United Nations Office,
New York and Geneva
Bahá'í International Community,
Brussels Office
Offices of External Affairs of the
National Assemblies of Australia, Austria,
Brazil, Canada (Ottawa and Toronto), France,
Germany, India, Ireland, Luxembourg,
the Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway,
Spain, Sweden, Switzerland,
the United Kingdom, and the United States